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THE HELLENIC CURRENT IN ENGLISH NINETEENTH  
CENTURY POETRY

I

There are two ways in which the literature of a foreign country may influence our own poetry: as a forming spirit, molding any material either that of its own or that of another nation; or as a source of material, molded by any forming spirit, whether Greek, Roman, or medieval. The two methods are often distinct and often merge. William Mason's *Elfrida* is Greek in spirit, medieval in subject matter. The Hellenic tales of William Morris's *Earthly Paradise* are Greek in material, medieval-romantic in atmosphere. Wordsworth's *Laodamia* is Greek in both.

The problems raised by a discussion of these two influences are also different. In studying the working of the Hellenic or the medieval spirit we must ask ourselves whether we have truly comprehended or misconceived it; whether it will assimilate with our existing culture; whether it is the element best fitted to maintain artistic balance in our national life. In tracing the use of Hellenic material by modern poets, the exploiting of ancient history, legend, and mythology, we are confronted by other questions. Does the richness of association investing these tales make them still especially fit for poetry, or are they becoming shopworn from overuse? Does continual association with events caused by an obsolete social system tend to expand our horizon; or does it, on the contrary, tend to produce certain stereotyped faults, akin to those of decadent neo-classicism, in the handling of both incident and phraseology? So distinct are the two sets of problems that a critic might with perfect consistency advocate for our modern poetry a great increase in the Hellenic spirit and a great decrease in the use of Hellenic legend.

In his *Greek Influence on English Poetry* the late J. Churton Collins has recently discussed the first and more difficult problem. We wish to supplement his work by tracing the use of Greek material through the nineteenth century, drawing some conclusions and leaving others for our readers. Occasionally we may have gone too far into the limbo of forgotten rhymers; but for the modern poet and critic failure at times has its lesson as well as success.

Although we have heard repeatedly that English neo-classicism was Latin rather than Greek, it is something of a revelation to

analyze our writers from 1700 to 1812 and find how indifferent they seemed to the narrative possibilities of the chief classical literature. Pope, Thomson, Collins, Gray, Chatterton, the Wartons, Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith, Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, Blake, have not left us a single great original poem located on Greek soil or drawn from Greek mythology. This is the more marked when we remember that Gray and Thomas Warton were eminent Greek scholars, and that the poems of Collins teem with Grecian allusions. There were evidently counter influences in the air. The few versifications based on Hellenic material during that long period are now almost unreadable. Thomson's *Liberty* and *Agamemnon*, Home's *Agis*, Glover's *Leonidas*, Beattie's *Judgment of Paris*,—who outside of specialists as much as hears their names? Even Akenside's *Hymn to the Naiads* and the digression on Greece in the last book of Falconer's *Shipwreck* are following their less deserving comrades into oblivion.

The early nineteenth century writers before 1812 make only a little better showing. The poems of Wordsworth published before 1814, the earlier works of Coleridge, Southey, Scott, Campbell, and of the more poetical minors, such as Hogg and Leyden, almost ignore Hellas. Moore's paraphrase of *Anacreon* (1800), though well received, was essentially a schoolboy's exercise. Two or three early minor poems of his on Greek themes are short and insignificant. Some of Landor's early poems might be mentioned; but these were unknown and still are. His *Count Julian* and *Gebir* are Spanish in location, whatever they may be in spirit.

To find much in this decade we must go down among the minors. William Sotheby, Byron's pet aversion, "that Itch of Scribbling personified,"<sup>1</sup> in 1802 published his *Orestes*, a crude play mixing a melodramatic ghost crying "Vengeance" with classic antiquity. Mrs. Tighe's *Psyche* (1805) was on a Greek theme and influenced Keats's *Endymion*; but, aside from the fact that it is a minor work, it speedily drifts away from an earthly Hellas into a medieval dreamland, with a feudal knight, a "Gothic castle", and all the allegorical machinery of Spenser. W. R. Wright in 1809 published his *Horae Ionicae*, written partly in Greece, partly from memory in England. The book is full of first-hand, though badly worded, descriptions of Greek scenes, but in meter and diction represents the most decadent stage of the Pope tradition.

<sup>1</sup> Prothero's *Byron's Letters*, IV, 228.

From 1812 on we find a reasonably distinct Hellenic current, turning both major and minor poets to Grecian themes, increasing or lessening from time to time, but continuing practically unbroken to the present day. That contemporaries felt this rise of a new stream is shown by a quotation from the *Edinburgh Review*<sup>2</sup> for 1813: "Greece, the mother of freedom and poetry in the West, which had long employed only the antiquary, the artist, and the philologist, was at length destined, after an interval of many silent and inglorious ages, to awaken the genius of a poet."

Before tracing this current we may pause to consider its causes. One of these was obviously the world-ransacking curiosity of the romantic generation. Another was the growing realization among the romanticists, after their first reaction against neo-classicism, that Greek literature<sup>3</sup> was not neo-classic. Another was the intrinsic beauty of that literature, which even in the garbled versions of the eighteenth century

"Would plead like angels trumpet-tongued against  
The deep damnation of its taking off."

But back of these, and stimulating them, lay the great revival in Greek scholarship near the turn of the century. "As in the seventeenth, so in the eighteenth century, Greek had not much hold on the many. Neglected in the public schools, neglected in the universities, not required either for degrees or for ordination, it was the rarest of accomplishments."<sup>4</sup> "The difficulty of the Greek language has always been an impediment in the way of knowledge of Greek literature, and this difficulty was for a long time aggravated in England by want of lexicons, grammars, and good texts, so that an intimate critical acquaintance with it was impossible

<sup>2</sup> Vol. XXII, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> "The machinery of early romance writers," wrote Southey in the Preface to his *Amadis of Gaul*, "is probably rather of classical than of Oriental origin. . . . Enchanted weapons may be traced to the workshop of Vulcan as easily as to the dwarfs of Scandinavia. The tales of dragons may be originally oriental; but the adventures of Jason and Hercules were popular tales in Europe, long before the supposed migration of Odin, or the birth of Mohammed. If magical rings were invented in Asia, it was Herodotus, who introduced the fashion into Europe? The fairies and ladies of the lake bear a closer resemblance to the nymphs and naiads of Rome and Greece, than to the peris of the East."

<sup>4</sup> J. Churton Collins' *Greek Influence on English Poetry*, p. 51.

till late in the eighteenth century."<sup>5</sup> For the cure of the latter evil, the world owes a lasting debt to Richard Porson, the greatest Greek scholar of his age, and far superior in that particular field to his eighteenth century predecessors. In textual criticism, comment, etc., his editions of the ancients were epoch-making, and they came just in time to influence the younger generation of the romantic poets. Byron studied Porson's edition of *Hecuba* at Harrow, and afterward bequeathed his copy to the library there.<sup>6</sup> "The prince of Grecians," drunken and untidy, was no *arbiter elegantiarum*, but the effect of his work on poetry is unquestionable.

"Profoundly skill'd,—in learning deeply read,  
He form'd the *judgment*, while the *taste* he led. . . .  
In Grecian learning he was deeply vers'd,  
The best of Grecians, he was *own'd* the first,"

wrote a minor poet<sup>7</sup> in 1808, the year of his death. And De Quincey<sup>8</sup> reminds us that "as a Grecian, Coleridge must be estimated with a reference to the state and standard of Greek literature at that time and in this country. Porson had not yet raised our ideal." "Classical scholarship had not been represented by a single man of mark since the death of the learned Richard Bentley in 1742, and Porson, the eminent Greek scholar by whom it was revived, did not receive his appointment as professor until 1793,"<sup>9</sup> says Professor Legouis; and he adds that at Cambridge, Porson's university, "The<sup>10</sup> mathematical tripos, or principal competitive examination was instituted in 1747, the classical tripos not until 1824," which was just about the time that the Tennyson brothers began to come to Cambridge.

Increasing knowledge of Hellas itself went hand in hand with increasing knowledge of Hellenic literature. Between 1784 and 1818 Mitford was publishing in various installments his *History of Greece*. In spite of its faults it opened to the public a field which had not before been even respectably presented to them. In his Advertisement to the first edition Mitford declared that his

<sup>5</sup> J. Churton Collins' *Greek Influence on English Poetry*, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Lord Russell's *Memoirs of Moore*, II, 624.

<sup>7</sup> Barker's *Anecdotes*, II, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Coleridge and *Opium Eating*.

<sup>9</sup> Legouis' *William Wordsworth*, Matthews' translation, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

errors could only be excused by "The reality of the want," and a very stern, anti-literary reality that was. Mitford, at the suggestion of Gibbon, took this subject, not because he was especially in sympathy with it, but because it had been so glaringly neglected. The effect of such a work on a curious age craving for novelty and beauty, must have been considerable. Mrs. Hemans' *Storm of Delphi*, as she tells us in a footnote, was suggested by Mitford's citations from Herodotus; and other better poems must have had a similar origin.

The great increase in books of travel discussing Greece was also unquestionably a factor. The footnotes to Grecian poems by Moore and Mrs. Hemans refer repeatedly to many such books, most of which appeared between 1760 and 1830. A number of other works on scholarship and travel in Greece during this period are cited by Professor H. T. Peck in his *History of Classic Philology* (p. 380). *The Monthly Review* for August, 1811, reviewing books of Sir William Gell, (*The Topography of Troy* (1804), *Geography and Antiquities of Ithaca* (1807,) etc.) mentions "that laudable curiosity concerning the remains of classical antiquity, which has of late years increased among our countrymen."<sup>11</sup>

Another cause was Byron's journey to Greece—in itself part of the increasing tourist current turning there—and the sudden popularity in 1812 of his poetry describing it (*Childe Harold*, Canto II). The purely Hellenic current was also at first associated with, and encouraged by, the great Orientalizing movement led by Byron and Moore. Between 1812 and 1840 at least many poets saw in all Greece what Lord Houghton saw specially in Corfu,

"A portal, whence the Orient,  
The long-desired, long-dreamt of, Orient,  
Opens upon us, with its stranger forms,  
Outlines immense and gleaming distances,  
And all the circumstance of faery-land."<sup>12</sup>

By the irony of destiny, the movement that Byron precipitated was additionally furthered by an act which he himself in *The Curse of Minerva* had denounced as vandalism. Not far from the time when the great poet returned to England with *Childe Harold* in his portmanteau, Lord Elgin brought to the same shores from Greece the famous Elgin Marbles; and in 1816 they were pur-

<sup>11</sup> P. 371.

<sup>12</sup> *Corfu* (written 1832).

chased by the government and put on public exhibition in the British Museum. The Hellenizing influence of so much beautiful sculpture in a place so easily accessible could not but have its effect. Both Keats and Mary Shelley<sup>13</sup> speak of spending an afternoon in the Museum with the Elgin Marbles. Keats wrote two sonnets on them, in one of which he says:

“So do these wonders [bring] a most dizzy pain,  
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude  
Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main—  
A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.”

These sonnets were addressed to Keats's friend, the painter Haydon, who had published an essay pointing out the beauties of the sculptures in question, and done all in his power to spread their influence. Hazlitt<sup>14</sup> in *Table Talk* says of statues that he “never liked any till I saw the Elgin marbles.” The mood which they would tend to develop in a man is exactly that found in Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Less important, though of the same nature, was the greater accessibility to Englishmen after 1814 of the classic art treasures of the Louvre, treasures which had been almost closed to them for two decades by the French wars. “The reader may remember,” says Beattie,<sup>15</sup> “the enthusiasm with which Campbell had visited the antique statues in the Louvre [in 1814]. The effect was still fresh in his mind, and when he resumed his lectures on the Poetry of Greece [in 1818], his prose was enriched by frequent allusions to her sculptures.”

The last and most obvious of the causes we are discussing was the revolt of the Greeks against Turkey in 1821, which turned on them the eyes of all Europe. The connection of this war with literature is patent, and needs no discussion except a reminder that “coming events cast their shadows before,” and that the strain and unrest of the Greeks—their longing for liberty in an age when the French Revolution had set every one dreaming of liberty—must have influenced English poetry long before the first cannon was fired.

Bearing these causes in mind, let us take up the beginning and first broadening of the current, the period from 1812 to 1830. By

<sup>13</sup> Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, II, 183.

<sup>14</sup> Waller and Glover's ed., VI, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Beattie's *Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell*, II, 93.

a strange mockery of fate, the great original impetus came from a spirit in some ways the very opposite to Athenian art, from Byron. But that Byron became an innovator was not due merely to the fact that he happened to travel in modern Attica. Deep in his heart he admired and longed for the very elements he lacked. We feel this in *Manfred*, where the stormy Byronic hero confronts the Witch of the Alps, with her calm brow, "Whereon is glassed serenity of soul." And Byron loved the country of Hellas, with its associations. His "longings constantly turned toward Greece. Even before the actual publication of *Childe Harold* Dallas and other friends pressed him to continue it; this, he replied, was impossible in England, he could only do it under the blue skies of Greece."<sup>16</sup> Hence it was not so strange that the "rhyming peer" should lead in the revival under discussion. His second canto of *Childe Harold*, written largely on Grecian soil, was filled with existing ruins and the glory of past associations,

"When wandering slow by Delphi's sacred side,  
Or gazing o'er the plains where Greek and Persian died."

"And yet how lovely in thine age of woe,  
Land of lost gods and godlike men, art thou."

"Where'er we tread 'tis haunted, holy ground."

Then followed *The Giaour*, and *The Bride of Abydos*, which, though Oriental tales, contain long interpolated passages on the past glory of Hellas and the Trojan war.

"Clime of the unforgotten brave!" says *The Giaour*  
"Shrine of the mighty! can it be,  
That this is all remains of thee? . . .  
Say, is not this Thermopylae? . . .  
Pronounce what sea, what shore is this?  
The gulf, the rock of Salamis!"

The second canto of *The Bride of Abydos* devotes over fifty lines to musings on the plain of Troy, memories of Leander, Priam, Achilles, Alexander, and Homer. *The Corsair* and *The Siege of Corinth* are located on Grecian soil, and though little connected with the great past suggest it occasionally. Byron's *Prometheus* is a Promethean theft from the mythology of Aeschylus; and in his poem on his thirty-sixth year he cries:

"The sword, the banner, and the field,  
Glory and Greece, around me see!

<sup>16</sup> Elze's *Life of Byron*, p. 130 of Eng. Translation.



The Spartan borne upon his shield,  
Was not more free."

Most intense of all in its Hellenism is "The isles of Greece" in Canto III of *Don Juan*:

"Where burning Sappho loved and sung,  
Where grew the arts of war and peace,  
Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung."

If we should say that Byron is praising the land of poets whose thought and style were utterly unlike his own, he would be first to acknowledge it and point to his own lines:

"And must their lyre so long divine,  
Degenerate into hands like mine."

The two great products of this current before 1830 were Keats and Shelley, but others around and before them were touched by it. Mrs. Hemans, significant through popularity if not through merit, turns from domesticity and medievalism to write *Modern Greece* (1817), a poem of a thousand lines in imitation of *Childe Harold*.

"Oh! who hath trod thy consecrated clime,  
Fair land of Phidias! theme of lofty strains!  
And traced each scene, that, 'midst the wrecks of time,  
The print of Glory's parting step retains," etc.

The same author gives us over a dozen scattering short poems on Grecian themes: *The Last Song of Sappho*; *The Spartan's March*, etc.

Her *Tombs of Platea* begins:

"And there they sleep!—the men who stood  
In arms before the exulting sun,  
And bathed their spears in Persian blood,  
And taught the earth how freedom might be won."

In 1818 T. L. Peacock, soaked for years in the best literature of antiquity, printed his one masterly poem, *Rhododaphne*, Grecian in story, and Attic in its polished style, wildly romantic as are its incidents.

Tom Moore's *Evenings in Greece* (1826) is very feeble poetry; but its length shows that the author felt the growing current. The scene is modern, but, like all descriptions of modern Greece, tinged with some past associations. Moore's *Legendary Ballads* (1828) contain short poems on the Greek themes of *Cupid* and

*Psyche, Hero and Leander*, and *Cephalus and Procris*. His *Memoirs* (published by Lord John Russell) show that the Irish lyrist during this period read many books or articles about Greece and Greek literature, among them Fouriel's *Chantes Populaires de la Grèce*.<sup>17</sup> Campbell in 1822 wrote his *Song of the Greeks*,

"Again to the battle, Achaians!"

and in 1828 his *Stanzas on the Battle of Navarino*,

"Hearts of oak that have bravely delivered the brave,  
And uplifted old Greece from the brink of the grave."

Barry Cornwall in 1823 published his *Flood of Thessaly*, a poem of over a thousand lines developing in fair Miltonic verse the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha. It ends with Deucalion's Miltonic vision of the coming glories of ancient Hellas. Barry Cornwall also, in his *Dramatic Scenes* (1819) includes *Lysander and Ione* "a pastoral" with "something of the familiarity of a common dialogue," like the more playful style of Landor. Lysander's description of a waterfall, "Rich as Dorado's paradise," shows a romantic mercy toward anachronisms.

The current produced from Wordsworth one classic masterpiece, *Laodamia* (1815), located in the Greece of the Trojan wars and celebrating "calm pleasures" and "majestic pains." Lamb felt that a change had come over the poet of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and wrote to Wordsworth: "*Laodamia* is a very original poem; I mean original with reference to your own manner. You have nothing like it. I should have seen it in a strange place, and greatly admired it, but not suspected its derivation."<sup>18</sup> The same atmosphere appears in his *Dion* (1820):

"Mourn, hills and groves of Attica! and mourn  
Ilissus, bending o'er thy classic urn."

Wordsworth also produced three mediocre sonnets on Greek themes: "When Philoctetes in the Lemnian isle" (1827); and the two sonnets *On a Celebrated Event in Ancient History*, published 1815 but written 1810. Beddoes, probably not long after 1820, turned from his haunted charnel-house to write *Pygmalion*, a Greek theme handled somewhat in the style of Keats's *Lamia*. Leigh Hunt in 1819 published his *Hero and Leander*. The same

<sup>17</sup> Russell II, 515.

<sup>18</sup> Lucas's Lamb's Works, VI, 457.

subject was treated more at length and with more success by Tom Hood in 1827. In the same volume with the latter Hood published his charming *Lycus, the Centaur*, which portrays the terrible effects of Circe's power with romantic horror sufficiently unlike *Comus*. Passing mention can also be afforded to *Ariadne* (1814) by Edward, Baron Thurlow, *The Naiad* (1816) by Keats's friend and one time poetic rival, J. H. Reynolds, and Praed's prize poem *Athens* (1824).

Enough has been said to show that in the decade and a half following 1812 there was a widespread Hellenic tendency. In the midst of this current rise, as its two chief exponents, Keats and Shelley. In Keats's first volume the Greek element is slight, and is completely overshadowed by pseudo-medievalism. But in his second work the growing tide has caught him. *Endymion* in mood and style is distinctly Spenserian, not Homeric; but its subject matter is wholly Attic and is regarded through a loving though uncritical eye. In the third or 1820 book of poems *Lamia*, the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode to Psyche*, and the unfinished *Hyperion* are classic in the noblest sense of the word, and as nobly Grecian as anything in our language.

The Greek element in Keats is the instinctive answer of deep to deep, and by no means confined to poems on Greek mythology. Compare with his well known *Ode To Autumn* the following lines from Pater's<sup>19</sup> translation of Theocritus:

"The scent of late summer and of the fall of the year was everywhere; the pears fell from the trees at our feet, and apples in number rolled down at our sides. . . . A cup like this ye poured out now upon the altar of Demeter, who presides over the threshing-floor. May it be mine, once more, to dig my big winnowing-fan through her heaps of corn; and may I see her smile upon me, holding poppies and handfuls of corn in her two hands!"

Shelley, like Keats, was drawn in among the Hellenists after he had already appeared as an author, although a love for things Grecian seems always to have existed in both. *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam*, and *Rosalind and Helen* have nothing especially Greek either in spirit or matter, nor is any such element sharply prominent in *Alastor*. The *Cenci* is Elizabethan rather than Greek, and full of verbal echoes from Shakespeare. *Swellfoot the Tyrant* (1820) though redolent of Aristophanes, is not a great drama.

<sup>19</sup> In *Demeter and Persephone*.

It is in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and scattering poems, chiefly posthumous, which follow it, that Shelley's discipleship to the ancients becomes mature. *Hellas* (1821) was suggested by the *Persians* of Aeschylus; and, imperfect as it is, reveals its great model in the noble closing chorus. The following short poems, all written after 1819, are thoroughly Greek: *Arethusa*; *Song of Proserpine, while gathering flowers*; *Hymn of Apollo*; *Hymn of Pan*; *Orpheus*. At least three of these belong to the highest order of poetry. The *Prometheus Unbound*, by the direct comparison which it invites with Aeschylus, shows what the Hellenic current in English poetry before 1830 was and what it was not. Attic symmetry is found only fitfully in the short poems and almost never in the long ones. The action of *Prometheus Unbound* is dramatic and Aeschylean only in the first act, where the ancient models are most closely followed. The rest of the poem, like a river released from its levees, spreads out into a meandering, beautiful, uncharted marsh, with water lilies and moonshine and music across the waves. Yet certain unquestionably Greek elements are there; the pure sense of beauty, the avoidance of the medieval grotesque, the world of the calm superman as opposed to the stormy superman of Byron. All of these elements appear also in *Hyperion*, and the first two in *Endymion*.

The Hellenic current was an outgrowth of the romantic movement. In its own productions it was sometimes thoroughly romantic, sometimes doubtfully so; but it was never neo-classic. It is perhaps significant that no poems on Grecian themes were produced by either Crabbe or Rogers, although the latter locates his most lengthy poem in the country of the ancient Romans. In general the writers of the romantic generation saw the light of *Hellas* as they did that of the Middle Ages, through the stained glass of a temperament, which sometimes resulted in a startling juxtaposition of the words *classic* and *romantic*. Mrs. Hemans in *Modern Greece* (xxiii) addresses a Greek ruin as "romantic temple," and adds two lines below:

"Years, that have changed thy river's *classic* name,  
Have left thee still in savage pomp sublime."

lxvii: "Thebes, Corinth, Argos!—ye, renown'd of old,  
Where are your chiefs of high *romantic* name?"

Campbell in his lectures on Greek poetry said that "scarce any conception of romantic poetry existed, the germ of which

might not be traced to the *Odyssey*.<sup>20</sup> K. H. Digby in his *Broad Stone of Honour* emphasizes the fact that Greek poets loved remote lands and ages: "Of all the Grecian princes who went to Troy, Ulysses was from the country most remote from the land of Homer. The heroes of the Athenian tragic drama, the Pelopidae, and the Labdacidae, were all foreigners. Pausanias remarks that the Greeks must always have more admired the wonders of foreign countries than of their own; since their most celebrated historians have described the pyramids of Egypt with the greatest exactness, and have said nothing of the royal treasury of Minyas, nor of the walls of Tirynthus, no less admirable than the pyramids."<sup>21</sup> But a less romantic, more truly classic note often appears, as, for example in Hazlitt's *Round Table*,<sup>22</sup> a quotation from which may be compared with Keats's *Grecian Urn*: "The gusto in the Greek statues is of a very singular kind. The sense of perfect form nearly occupies the whole mind, and hardly suffers it to dwell on any other feeling. It seems enough for them *to be*, without acting or suffering. Their forms are ideal, spiritual. Their beauty is power. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of pain or passion; by their beauty they are deified." Shelley writes:<sup>23</sup> "Could a Grecian architect have commanded all the labour and money which are expended on Versailles, he would have produced a fabric which the whole world has never equalled."

The less romantic attitude toward Greece was not a less enthusiastic one. "Rome and Athens,"<sup>24</sup> declared Hazlitt, "filled a place in the history of mankind, which can never be occupied again." In his posthumous *Essay on the Revival of Literature* (1832) Shelley speaks of "Grecian literature,—the finest the world has ever produced." Unlike Hazlitt, however, he admired Greece at the expense of Rome. In a letter to Peacock, January 26th, 1819, he cries: "O, but for that series of wretched wars which terminated in the Roman conquest of the world; but for the Christian religion, which put the finishing stroke on the ancient

<sup>20</sup> Redding's *Literary Reminiscences*, I, 113.

<sup>21</sup> Godefridus, p. 19, ed. of 1844.

<sup>22</sup> Waller and Glover's ed., I, 79.

<sup>23</sup> Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, II, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Waller and Glover's ed., I, 4.

system; but for those changes which conducted Athens to its ruin, —to what an eminence might not humanity have arrived!" He writes again to John Gisborne, November 16, 1819: "Were not the Greeks a glorious people? What is there, as Job says of the Leviathan, like unto them? If the army of Nicias had not been defeated under the walls of Syracuse; if the Athenians had, acquiring Sicily, held the balance between Rome and Carthage, sent garrisons to the Greek colonies in the South of Italy, Rome might have been all that its intellectual condition entitled it to be, a tributary, not the conqueror of Greece."

## II

The Hellenic tradition, though the child of the Romantic generation, did not collapse with its parent movement but continued on unbroken into the later nineteenth century. Certain characteristics shown in its beginning have clung to it ever since. One of these is its constant alliance with the medieval tradition. Almost every author who has written poems on ancient Greece has written others on the Middle Ages. Byron had his *Manfred*, Keats his *Eve of St. Agnes*, Tennyson his *Morte d'Arthur*, Swinburne his *Tale of Balen*, William Morris his *Ogier the Dane*, Lewis Morris his *Vision of Saints*, de Tabley his *Two Old Kings*, Landor his *Count Julian*, Matthew Arnold his *Tristram and Iseult*, and so we might go on. Hellenism and medievalism pair off against each other in volume after volume like positive and negative poles in a series of electric batteries. Another characteristic of the Greek tradition is that each poet turns to it only at intervals. No one author, not Shelley, Arnold, or Landor even, has ever surrendered himself to it as completely as Scott did to medievalism or Crabbe to harsh realism.

At the same time, while the above characteristics always hold true, the Greek current changes very perceptibly as it passes through the different waves or *Zeitgeists* of the century. Before 1830 it was mainly romantic. Between 1830 and 1860 it wavers between romanticism and the more restrained and reflective classicism, the latter finally winning a temporary triumph in the work of Landor and Arnold. The tendency away from romance is shown by contrasting Tennyson's *Ænone* and *Lotus Eaters* (1833) with the sterner and less hazily atmospheric *Ulysses* and *Tithonus* (1842).

The collapse of the Romantic generation made not even a break in the tradition we are tracing. In 1830, only three years after Hood's *Lycus, the Centaur* and directly following the Greek poems in Moore's *Legendary Ballads* appeared Tennyson's *Sea Fairies*, slight but prophetic; and in the same year were printed The Poetical Works of the Rev. George Croly written chiefly in the period between 1816 and 1823, but now first published in one collection. They contain considerable Greek verse, especially the *Gems from the Antique*, a series of short poems, each accompanied by an engraving of the carved gem on which the lines are based. W. E. Aytoun, the Scotch poet followed in 1832 with his boyish *Homer*, the story of the great epic singer and the protest of the romantic poet against the world, voiced in fifty-eight stanzas of weakly sweet *ottava rima*.

Lord Houghton (Richard Monckton Milnes) the devoted editor of Keats, in 1834 published his *Memorials of a Tour in Greece and Italy*, a series of short poems on Hellenic subjects, the dignified verse of a scholar, though not of a great master. The influence of "the Poet Keats, to whom the old Greek mind seemed instinctively familiar"<sup>25</sup> is obvious, especially in such lines as these:

"And downward thence to latest days  
The heritage of Beauty fell,  
And Grecian forms and Grecian lays  
Prolonged their humanizing spell."<sup>26</sup>

In Houghton, as in Keats, there is sympathetic harmony between classic and medieval legend. He can see in Grecian olive forests

"Sylvan cathedrals, such as in old times  
Gave the first life to Gothic art, and led  
Imagination so sublime a way."<sup>27</sup>

Likewise in the opening lines of his *Modern Greece* he speaks of the medieval story of the enchanted princess as "the legend which our childhood loved."

The Preface to his *Poetical Works* of 1876 throws some light on the Hellenic current, its nature and causes:

"The Grecian poems [of 1834] have their date in that period of life which, in a cultivated Englishman, is almost universally touched and coloured by the studies and memories of the classic

<sup>25</sup> Houghton's note prefixed to *The Concentration of Athens*.

<sup>26</sup> *The Flowers of Helicon*.

<sup>27</sup> *Corfu* (written 1832).

world; and the scenes and personages they commemorate are, as it were, the most natural subjects of his poetic thought and illustration. . . . There were, too, at that time, earnest expectations of a regenerated Greece, to which not only the visionary poet, but the sober politician must now look back with disappointment; and the agreeable associations of a glorious ideal past, with an approximate interesting future, may be said to have passed away." Incidentally Lord Houghton's article in the *Edinburgh Review* which drew public attention to the merits of *Atalanta in Calydon* connects him in later life with the Hellenic current.

We are not concerned here with translations, yet it is well to remember that in 1835 Mrs. Browning published her Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. She also made other translations from the Greek, but does not belong to the succession of Attic imitators, and seems to oppose them in *The Dead Pan* where she cries to the old gods:

"Get to dust as common mortals,  
By a common doom and track!  
Let no Schiller from the portals  
Of that Hades call you back. . . .  
Earth outgrows the mythic fancies  
Sung beside her in her youth:  
And those debonaire romances  
Sound but dull beside the truth.  
Phoebus' chariot-course is run!  
Look up, poets, to the sun!"

Thomas Noon Talfourd, author among other things of a History of Greek Poetry, produced in 1836 and 1838 his two dramas *Ion* and *The Athenian Captive*; and the growing severity of taste in classic matters may account for what Hugh Walker calls "the cold dignity of Talfourd's style."<sup>28</sup> Talfourd's *Ion* took some suggestions from the play of the same name by Euripides. Though now overlooked it once had wide popularity. An American edition appeared within one year after the original one, and the American editors prefixed a preface declaring that "after the production of *Ion* Sergeant Talfourd, like Lord Byron, awoke one morning and found himself famous." They also take pains to make New York readers realize the tendency of the book: "*Ion* is a splendid attempt to recall into the power of life and sympathy the long buried genius of the antique Tragedy of Fate. The plot

<sup>28</sup> *Age of Tennyson*, p. 47.



moves and hinges upon machinery similar to that of the old Greek dramas." In Talfourd's *Ion*, Agenor speaks of the hero certain lines which seem to represent a "classic" ideal (not very well attained by the author):

"So his life hath flow'd  
From its mysterious urn a sacred stream,  
In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure  
Alone are mirror'd; which, though shapes of ill  
May hover round its surface, glides in light,  
And takes no shadow from them." (I. 1)

And Ion himself (I. 1) speaks of

"words which bear the spirit of great deeds  
Wing'd for the future";

which might express Talfourd's unsuccessful aspiration toward the "grand style."

Thoas, the Athenian warrior captured at Corinth, when he hears the Corinthians insult his country, bursts out in praise of it which may represent the dramatist's own attitude.

" 'Tis not a city crown'd  
With olive and enrich'd with peerless fanes  
Ye would dishonour, but an opening world  
Diviner than the soul of man hath yet  
Been gifted to imagine—truths serene,  
Made visible in beauty, that shall glow  
In everlasting freshness; unapproach'd  
By mortal passion; pure amidst the blood  
And dust of conquests; never waxing old;  
But on the stream of time, from age to age,  
Casting bright images of heavenly youth  
To make the world less mournful. I behold them!  
And ye, frail insects of a day, would quaff  
'Ruin to Athens!' " (II, 11)

And Thoas in dying says (V, 1):

"Convey me to the city of my love;  
Her future years of glory stream more clear  
Than ever on my soul. O Athens! Athens!"

The Greek poetry of Aubrey de Vere forms only a small part of his verse, but is worth mention. He seems to handle with a certain Roman Catholic reluctance "the beautiful fictions of Greek Mythology." His Mascue, *The Search After Proserpine*, is a pretty little patchwork of lyric and atmospheric romanticism.

His *Recollections of Greece*, which he dedicated to Walter Savage Landor, are fluently mediocre and sometimes rather merry than reverent in tone; and the *Lines Written Under Delphi* arraign the ancient world for its lack of Christian virtues in a way decidedly narrow and sectarian. Yet the spell at times will grip him, as in his lines on Sophocles and Aeschylus; and the eagle calls to him on the field of Marathon: "Yes, yes—'tis Hellas, Hellas still!" His drama *Alexander the Great*, published many years later, belongs only incidentally to our subject. It deals with the post-classic period of Greek history; it has the loose, rambling structure of the most lax Elizabethans; and it is located, not in Hellas, but in the romantic Orient. The best passages of poetry in it are generally in the style of the nineteenth century romantic poets. In connection with the dramas of Talfourd and de Vere, a bare mention is ample honor for Andrew Becket's *Socrates*, "a Drama on the Model of the Ancient Greek Tragedy," which had reached an undeserved third edition by 1838. The classical drama was evidently at this time beginning to appeal to the popular taste.

In 1846 the growing tendency toward Attic dignity freed from excess of romantic atmosphere found its noblest expression in Landor's *Hellenics*,

"The bland Attic skies  
True-mirrored by an English well,"<sup>29</sup>

as William Watson has well described them. Some poems of this collection had appeared in cruder form before; but it was now that they first really found an audience. The opening lines (of the enlarged 1847 ed.) strike the keynote of the book:

"Who will away to Athens with me? who  
Loves choral songs and maidens crown'd with flowers,  
Unenvious? mount the pinnacle; hoist the sail.  
I promise ye, as many as are here,  
Ye shall not, while ye tarry with me, taste  
From unrinsed barrel the diluted wine  
Of a low vineyard or a plant ill-pruned,  
But such as anciently the Aegean isles  
Pour'd in libation at their solemn feasts:  
And the same goblets shall ye grasp, embost  
With no vile figures of loose, languid boors,  
But such as Gods have lived with and have led."

<sup>29</sup> On Landor's "*Hellenics*."

At times there is a fine reserved pleasure in flowers, sunlight, and the good things of life; more often a stoical power that in its mingling of dramatic force with statuesque language makes us think of the Laocoön. Agamemnon first meets his daughter in Hades; and Iphigenia, knowing nothing of all the adultery and murder that has happened on earth since her death, innocently asks her father for news of their family:

“Tell me then,  
Tell how my mother fares who loved me so,  
And griev’d, as ’twere for you, to see me part,  
Frown not, but pardon me for tarrying  
Amid too idle words, nor asking why  
She prais’d us both (which most?) for what we did.”

Landor’s *Heroic Idylls* (1863) contains lines apparently written long before, *Remonstrance and Address to Lord Byron*, saying significantly:

“Open thy latticed window wide  
For breezes from the Aegean tide;  
And from Hymettus may its bee  
Bear honey on each wing to thee.”

Landor’s *Hellenics*, unlike the neo-classical work of Alfieri and Racine abroad, and of Swinburne, deTabley, the two Morris, etc., in England, ignores the lofty but somewhat threadbare themes of a too well known past, and deals in characters and stories that are new. This procedure has its drawbacks, for Landor is clumsy and obscure in the mechanical details of narrative, introducing characters without explaining their relations to others, and getting repeatedly tangled up in such an elementary matter as the reference of personal pronouns. Nevertheless his choice of subject does give a force and vitality which we often miss in other Hellenists. He was Athenian enough in his nature to know that the ancient Athenians, unlike their poetic imitators, always “desired some new thing.”

Unlike most of his fellow Hellenists also,—in spite of his medieval *Count Julian*—he made no compromise with the sham medievalism of the romanticists. “It is hardly to be expected,” he writes before his *Hellenics*, “that ladies and gentlemen will leave on a sudden their daily promenade, skirted by Turks and shepherds and knights and plumes and palfreys, of the finest Tunbridge manufacture, to look at these rude frescoes, delineated on an old

wall high up, and sadly weak in coloring. As in duty bound, we can wait."

The later Greek poems of his *Heroic Idyls* drop the narrative form, which is always more of an incumbrance than a help to Landor, and become *Imaginary Conversations* in blank verse, often suffused with an autumnal calm of mood which reminds one of the *Œdipus at Colonus*.

Far below Landor's poetry in merit but far above it in immediate popular appeal was R. H. Horne's *Orion*. It is a narrative in blank verse, reminiscent of Keats's *Hyperion* in the gigantic nature of its characters, and of *Endymion* in occasional passages of luscious description and the mawkishness of its love affairs with goddesses, the whole often marred by a soaring grandiloquence akin to that of Bailey's *Festus*. Horne is vastly inferior to Keats as a poet, but much superior as a story-teller, and the directness and excitement of his narrative probably account partly for his ephemeral popularity, six editions of *Orion* appearing in the year of its publication (1843). The poem abounds with the most romantic incidents; and Book II opens with an echo of *Ossian*:

"Beneath a tree, whose heaped-up burthen swayed  
In the high wind, and made a rustling sound,  
As of a distant host that scale a hill,  
Autarces and Encolyon gravely sat."<sup>30</sup>

In 1864 Horne published *Prometheus the Fire Bringer*, a connecting link between Shelley and Mrs. Browning in the past and Robert Bridges and William Vaughn Moody in the future.

Next in importance to Landor's *Hellenics* and soon after them in time came Matthew Arnold's Greek dramas, *Empedocles on Etna* with its noble lyric choruses, and the correct but more colorless *Merope*. In connection with these dramas we must remember Arnold's remarks in his essay on *Pagan and Medieval Religious Sentiment*, which show in what direction he was trying to lead contemporary poetry: "There is a century in Greek life,—the century . . . from about the year 530 B. C. to about the year 430,—in which Poetry made, it seems to me, the noblest, the most successful effort she has ever made as the priestess of the imaginative reason, of the element by which the modern spirit, if it would live right, has chiefly to live. Of this effort . . . the four great

<sup>30</sup> "Cuthullin sat by Tura's wall, by the tree of the rustling sound."  
Opening of *Fingal*.



decade had seen. There was hardly a year from 1860 to 1900 that did not see the publication of some at least respectable verse on Greek themes. Now also Romanticism in English poetry after a temporary lapse had been revived by the Pre-Raphaelites; and once more, as early in the century, romanticism and Hellenism blend in a deep and widening stream. It is not all romantic, however. Side by side with Swinburne and Morris we have Browning at last delving deep into Greek material; and Browning shows how much the current that we are discussing adapted itself to the man, inspiring him but not reducing him to the common norm. Browning's *Balaustion's Adventure*, etc., though ultra Greek in their spelling of proper names, are in essence neither Hellenic nor romantic, but psychological, neither of the fifth century B. C. nor of the French Revolution, but of the mid-nineteenth century. It is significant that the Brownings cared less for Sophocles and Aeschylus than for Euripides, the most cosmopolitan, the least Attic of the three:

"Our Euripides the human  
With his droppings of warm tears,  
And his touches of things common  
Till they rose to higher spheres."

Here they are in sharp contrast with Landor, who preferred

"No vile figures of loose, languid boors,  
But such as Gods have lived with and have led."

F. T. Palgrave, the friend of Matthew Arnold, wrote little verse on Greek material; but he dedicated his *Lyrical Poems* (1871) to the "Immortal Memory of Free Athens"; and in the following lines from the dedicatory poem he shows what faults of romanticism the Hellenic current was trying to eradicate, what virtues of romanticism it was trying to blend with itself:

"Where are the flawless form,  
The sweet propriety of measured phrase,  
The words that clothe the idea, not disguise,  
Horizons pure from haze,  
And calm clear vision of Hellenic eyes?"

"Strength ever veiled by grace;  
The mind's anatomy implied, not shown;  
No gaspings for the vague, no fruitless fires;—  
Yet heard 'neath all, the tone  
Of those far realms to which the soul aspires. . . .

"That unfantastic strain,  
 Void of weak fever and self-conscious cry,—  
 Truth bold and pure in her own nakedness,—  
 What modern hand can try,  
 Tracing the delicate line 'twixt More and Less?"

Along with the struggle between romanticism and classicism<sup>31</sup> in the Hellenic tradition, there develops in the late nineteenth century a growing tendency to interpret Greek material in a modern or realistic way. That is the final turn which Sir Lewis Morris gives to his *Epic of Hades*.

"The weary woman  
 Sunk deep in ease and sated with her life,  
 Much loved and yet unloving, pines today  
 As Helen."

George Barlow in his *Venus* (1881) declares

"The seas of Greece were not more fair  
 Than this which shines in August air. . . .  
 'Tis *we* have changed."

Robert Buchanan wrote several poems (1863-66) which handle Greek mythological subjects in a modern, sometimes a playful vein, of which *Pan*, a blank verse poem of some length, is the best and in metre seems to imitate Tennyson's *Ænone*. His *Pan: Epilogue* quotes Mrs. Browning's "Pan, Pan is dead," and retorts:

"O Pan, great Pan, thou are not dead,  
 Nor dost thou haunt that weedy place . . .  
 But *here* 'mid living waves of fate  
 We feel thee go and come! . . .  
 On rainy nights thy breath blows chill  
 In the street-walker's dripping hair," etc.

But in the Greek tradition from 1860 to 1880 at least the dominant impulse was romantic, and found critical expression ultimately in Pater as the mid century had found voice in Arnold. Between 1875 and 1890 Walter Pater gave as lectures and published his Greek studies. In these he enforces as critical doctrine what Keats, William Morris, and others had already tacitly assumed in composition—the essential kinship of the medieval and Hellenic cultures. "Like the exaggerated diabolical figures in some of the religious plays and imageries of the Middle Age," Pentheus "is an impersonation of stupid impiety."<sup>32</sup> "And then, again, as

<sup>31</sup> That is, classicism as found in Landor, Arnold, etc.

<sup>32</sup> *The Bacchanals of Euripides*.

in those quaintly carved and coloured imageries of the Middle Age . . . comes the full contrast, with a quite medieval simplicity and directness, between the insolence of the tyrant . . . and the outraged beauty of the youthful god."<sup>32</sup> "What was specially peculiar to the temper of the old Florentine painter, Giotto, to the temper of his age in general, doubtless, more than to that of ours, was the persistent and universal mood of the age in which the story of Demeter and Persephone was first created."<sup>33</sup> The Eleusinian Mysteries may have been a parallel to "the medieval ceremonies of Palm Sunday," etc.

In line with Morris he condemns the error which "underestimates the influence of the romantic spirit generally, in Greek poetry and art";<sup>33</sup> tells the academic neo-classicist that "such a conception of Greek art and poetry leaves in the central expressions of Greek culture none but negative qualities";<sup>33</sup> and declares "that the Romantic spirit was really at work in the minds of Greek artists."<sup>33</sup> He stresses the point that Claudian's *Rape of Proserpine*, which "closes the world of classical poetry,"<sup>33</sup> was "pre-eminently a work in colour, and excelling in a kind of painting in words"<sup>33</sup> (like the English Pre-Raphaelites and the French Romanticists).

How far from the conception of Greece and Greek literature expressed in Pope's *Essay on Criticism* we have moved in Pater's *Beginnings of Greek Sculpture*. "And the story of the excavations at Mycenae reads more like some well-devised chapter of fiction than a record of sober facts. Here, those sanguine, half-childish dreams of buried treasure discovered in dead men's graves, which seem to have a charm for every one, are more than fulfilled in the spectacle of those antique kings, lying in the splendour of their crowns and breastplates of embossed plate of gold; their swords, studded with golden imagery, at their sides, as in some feudal monument; their very faces covered up most strangely in golden masks."

In line with Pater, Andrew Lang in *Notes to his Helen of Troy* (1882) says: "In addition to these poetical legends about Helen, many other singular and wild traditions may be found in odd corners of Greek literature. . . . Eustathius, the Bishop of Thessalonica, had [according to Rosscher's recent book] already given the fable showing how Paris, by magic art, beguiled Helen

<sup>33</sup> *Demeter and Persephone*.



in the form of Menelaus, just as Uther, by Merlin's aid, deceived Ygerne, the mother of Arthur."

Practically all Hellenic poetry after 1860 follows in the wake of Swinburne. He worshipped ancient Hellas as star-gazers worship the moon, fascinated by a luminary of which he saw only one side and could never see the other. He felt the old Greek love of the dark blue sea, the old Greek glory of the flesh, the old Greek love of rich, sonorous verse; but he lived in a world of lawlessness and they in a world of law; he wrote in a mood of lavish profusion, they in a mood of noble economy. He might wish to roll away the Christian centuries, and cry:

"Fire for light and hell for heaven and psalms for paean  
Filled the clearest eyes and lips most sweet of song,  
When for chant of Greeks the wail of Galileans  
Made the whole world moan with hymns of wrath and wrong,"<sup>34</sup>

and near the end:

"For thy kingdom is past not away. . . .  
"We arise at thy bidding and follow,  
We cry to thee, answer, appear,  
A father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,  
Destroyer and healer, hear!"<sup>34</sup>

but Swinburne is a glorious hybrid, not such a Greek as Landor or Arnold. Yet their mantle fell on him even if he "wore it with a difference." His *Atalanta in Calydon*, (1865), the greatest Hellenic poem of the late nineteenth century—so well known that we cannot profitably discuss it here—was dedicated to Walter Savage Landor, "the highest of contemporary names." His *Erechtheus* (1876) strikes, but to finer music, the same note of praise for Athens that appears in Talfourd:

"Time nor earth nor changing sons of man . . . shall see  
So great a light alive beneath the sun  
As the aweless eye of Athens; all fame else  
Shall be to her fame as a shadow in sleep  
To this wide noon at waking . . . thine shall be  
The crown of all songs sung, of all deeds done."<sup>35</sup>

This drama, however, in spite of its sonorous rhythm, is somewhat harmed by excess of imitation. Athena appears at the end as with Euripides, and the metre of the dialogue varies much as that in Aeschylus' *Persians*.

<sup>34</sup> *The Last Oracle*.

<sup>35</sup> Speech of Athena.

Next to Swinburne in popular influence, and perhaps in poetical value, comes William Morris. He knew perfectly well what he was doing. He was drawing from the Greek stream certain elements fitted for his plans and temperament and rejecting all the rest. He seems to feel that many elements of the old Greek life and literature, admirable in themselves, could not be recalled. The old man in *News from Nowhere* says:<sup>36</sup> "All other moods save this [joy of life] had been exhausted: the unceasing criticism, the boundless curiosity in the ways and thoughts of man, which was the mood of the ancient Greek, to whom these things were not so much a means, as an end, was gone past recovery." Morris in the same book<sup>37</sup> describes the dress of his Utopians as "somewhat between that of the ancient classical costume and the simpler forms of the fourteenth century garments, though it was clearly not an imitation of either; the materials were light and gay to suit the season." This is not a bad description of his most famous poem, *The Earthly Paradise*, (1868-70), in which Greek and medieval tales alternate, and "The idle singer of an empty day" makes the stern old legends of Hellas and Scandinavia gently lyrical to suit the season in contemporary taste. The same may be said of his poetical but by no means Homeric *Life and Death of Jason*.

Yet the Hellenic current unquestionably affected Morris for good. With Keats and the German *Romantische Schule* compare the following from *News from Nowhere*.<sup>38</sup> "That we live amidst beauty without any fear of becoming effeminate; that we have plenty to do, and on the whole enjoy doing it. What more can we ask of life?" Then compare the same passage with Hazlitt's<sup>39</sup> dictum: "We have not that union in modern times of the heroic and literary character which was common among the ancients."

Sir Lewis Morris's *Epic of Hades* (1876) represents in bulk only about one-eighth of his poetry, but contains nearly all of his Hellenic verse. In mood he stands half-way between the romantic Grecianism of his greater namesake<sup>40</sup> and the Attic severity of Landor and deTabley. His poem is obviously modeled on Dante.

<sup>36</sup> Chap. XVIII.

<sup>37</sup> Chap. III.

<sup>38</sup> Chap. X.

<sup>39</sup> Waller and Glover's ed., VI, 110.

<sup>40</sup> A good opportunity to compare the styles of the two Morris is given in the story of Cupid and Psyche, told by both.

Like the *Divine Comedy* it opens in "the gloom of a dark grove"; like that it is divided into three parts, Tartarus, Hades, Olympus; like Dante the poet at the end of his vision swoons in the presence of the Supreme Being; and, as in Dante, while wandering through this world of classic ghosts,

"From the confessionals I hear arise  
Rehearsals of forgotten tragedies."

As the souls in Limbo were

"Only so far afflicted that we live  
Desiring without hope";

so Morris's Medusa in Hades

"knew no pain,  
Except her painful thought."

The mild sweetness of the blank verse is Tennysonian, and many verbal echoes of Tennyson occur.<sup>41</sup> But Sir Lewis Morris, with all his facile sweetness, and in spite of wide popularity, is too imita-

<sup>41</sup> Compare for example the following with Tennyson's *Ænone*:

"It was the time when a deep silence comes  
Upon the summer earth, and all the birds  
Have ceased from singing, and the world is still  
As midnight, and if any live thing move—  
Some fur-clad creature, or cool gliding snake—  
Within the pipy overgrowth of weeds,  
The ear can catch the rustle, and the trees  
And earth and air are listening."

*Marsyas.*

Also:

"A soft air breathes  
Across the stream, and fills these barren fields  
With the sweet odours of the earth."

Morris's *Persephone*.

"A soft air fans the cloud apart; there comes  
A glimpse of that dark world where I was born."

Tennyson's *Tithonus*.

"While round our feet  
The crocus flames like gold."

Morris's *Persephone*.

"And at their feet the crocus brake like fire."

Tennyson's *Ænone*.

<sup>41</sup> Compare also the speeches of Athena and Hera in Morris and in Tennyson's *Ænone*.

tive a writer to be great. He seems to feel himself that the very riches of his loved classical mythology have become shackles to him; that unlike Landor and deTabley, he has sunk into a neo-classicist.

"These fair tales, which we know so beautiful,  
Show only finer than our lives today  
Because their voice was clearer, and they found  
A sacred bard to sing them. We are pent,  
Who sing today, by all the garnered wealth  
Of ages of past song. We have no more  
The world to choose from, who, where'er we turn,  
Tread through old thoughts and fair. Yet must we sing."

Lord de Tabley is the follower of Landor in the stern, terse spirit of his poetry, in style more polished perhaps, certainly more lucid, and equally dignified, but with fewer single lines of condensed dramatic power. Landor says of Agamemnon:

"A groan that shook him shook not his resolve";

and Landor's Iphigenia, cries in answer:

"O father, grieve no more; the ships can sail!"

De Tabley's Iphigenia says:

"The earnest kings of Hellas carven sit,  
Between the steep courts of the sanctuary,  
And look the greatness of their lives in stone,  
Ringed in a terrible semblance of their state,  
With brooches on their chariots harnessed near:  
Austere dead men, rare-hearted in their age  
To push among and use the old iron days.  
I am their daughter and I will not fear;  
The cruel god consumes me and I go."

Occasionally, but only seldom, deTabley follows Landor in indulgent sympathy with youth and love; as in *The Nymph and the Hunter*. His usual vein is severe. His conception of love is that of Attic tragedy, not that of the romantic lyric:

"Who is this stern and radiant queen of fear,  
This strong god men adore, this power the nations hear?  
This is that Aphrodite fully grown . . .  
Pray not, for she is cruel, and thy groan  
Is as sweet incense wafted to her throne . . .  
'Or, queen of all delusion, come arrayed  
In thy fierce beauty; come, thou long delayed,  
With thy fair sliding feet and thy faint rippled hair.'"<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Orestes*.

DeTabley's *Philoctetes* (1866) and *Orestes* (1867) are admirable examples of modern imitations of the Greek tragedy, worthy to compare with Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*, by which they have been obviously influenced, especially in the choruses. In fact, as deTabley grew older, the influence of Swinburne obviously overshadowed that of Landor. Orestes is a Greek Hamlet, with a similar terrible family problem, who cries like an echo of the royal Dane:

"To act  
And to act merely, cleansing from my brain  
These weak irresolute fumes of thought, that hold  
My hand suspended from the vital sword. . . .  
Ah, to have done with thought and see my way,  
Then were I man."

Both the dramas and the short poems are cold, imitative, suggestive of many books and limited experience; but they are noble and sonorous, and at times, especially in the lyric choruses, sweep us out of ourselves in a way that makes criticism an offence.

DeTabley, though greatly admired by some, has never been popular, and probably could have done better than he did had he been more encouraged. The last lines of his *Phaethon* suggest the lonely prophet of Hellenic beauty:

"I think, that never more  
Can one stoop down and drink: and rising up,  
Flushed with a tingling inspiration, sing  
Beyond himself, and in a huckster age  
Catch some faint golden shadow into his page  
From that great day of Hellas and Hellas gods;  
Which these wise critics of the city of smoke  
Sneer at as wrack and lumber of the tombs."

DeTabley, like Wordsworth in *Laodamia*, admires a noble serenity of mind:

"For man is restless, but the God at rest:  
And that enormous energy of man  
Implies his imperfection";<sup>43</sup>

and the lofty atmosphere of his verse must give it a lasting value in spite of its coldness and deficiency in first-hand revelation of life.

Since 1880 the three most significant figures for our purposes—on a joint basis of bulk and merit in their Grecian poems—are perhaps Woolner, Frederick Tennyson, and the present poet

<sup>43</sup> *The Siren to Ulysses*.

laureate. In the main, their work is more scholarly and less romantic than that of their predecessors; and on the whole this is probably true of their contemporary minor figures, though with many reservations.

Thomas Woolner, a great sculptor and minor but genuine poet, published in advanced age three verse narratives of considerable length, *Pygmalion*, 1881; *Silenus*, 1884; *Tiresias*, 1886. These poems are as purely Greek in subject as Landor's *Hellenics*, filled with

"Nymphs, dryads, and wild naiades subdued,"<sup>44</sup>

with scattered allusions to

"Stories of a mighty day when Greeks  
Were God-directed, and when men obeyed."<sup>45</sup>

The stiffness of sculpture mars the blank verse, yet Woolner, like Landor, has many touches of vivid description.

Frederick Tennyson in 1890 published *The Isles of Greece*, written twenty years before, and in 1891 *Daphne and Other Poems*. In many of the poems here contained, especially those of the earlier volume, Hellenic names and mythological incidents serve merely as spring-boards by means of which the poet may leap into a fairyland of atmospheric description. The verse has much negative grace, but lacks body and narrative power. The title of the 1890 volume—which deals with the story of Sappho—was probably taken from Byron's:

"The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece,  
Where burning Sappho loved and sung."

Mr. Robert Bridges, the present poet laureate, in the eighties produced three neo-classical Greek plays, well sustained, though somewhat Academic: *Prometheus the Fire-giver*; *The Return of Ulysses*; and *Achilles in Scyros*. All of these open with a monologue in the manner of Euripides; and the first, at least in the speeches of Prometheus to Io, has many reminiscences of Aeschylus. There are choruses in the Greek manner, but inferior in merit, we believe, to Mr. Bridges' best short poems. The same author also rendered into English the story of Eros and Psyche from the Latin of Apuleius, a theme previously handled in Lewis Morris's *Epic of Hades* and William Morris's *Earthly Paradise*. One line from his version

<sup>44</sup> *Silenus*, p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> *Tiresias*, p. 24.

of this poem suggests the opening of one of Mr. Bridges' finest lyrics:

"And like a ship, that crowding all her sail."

In 1905 Mr. Bridges added his *Masque of Demeter*.

In 1882 Andrew Lang, the well known translator of the classics, published *Helen of Troy*, a narrative poem, showing the influence of Swinburne and William Morris, but more simple and direct in its narrative than either. It includes the death of Corythos, already Englished in Landor's *Hellenics*, and the death of Paris, already given in *The Earthly Paradise*. The same author's *Hesperothen* turns mythology into allegory. His sonnet on "The surge and thunder of the Odyssey" is probably known to everybody. His attitude toward the author of *Atalanta in Calydon* is indicated by his own words in the Note to *Helen of Troy*: "Helen, as a woman, has hardly found a nobler praise, in three thousand years, than Helen, as a child, has received from Mr. Swinburne."

John A. Symonds, author among many other prose works, of *Studies of the Greek Poets* and *Sketches in Italy and Greece*, later in life wrote a number of chastened and poetical Greek studies in verse, for example, the "Poems on Greek themes" in the 1880 volume, full of music modeled on "the sweet Ionian vowels." The use of Greek material, however, was incidental rather than characteristic of his verse, however deep his love for things Hellenic.

With these men we may include the Rev. E. C. Lefroy, whose *Echoes from Theocritus* (1883) paraphrases the great Sicilian in thirty sonnets graceful and sincerely felt. Lefroy was full of the Hellenic spirit in comment and criticism as well as in verse. He said of his own ideal: "Perhaps it inclines rather to be sexless—serene beauty uncontaminated by a suspicion of fleshliness. But I know that it is Greek."<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, as he resembled Keats in instinctive love for the ancient masters, so he resembled the greater poet in an untimely death.

*Callirrhoe* (1884) by "Michael Field" is a drama which reflects as models both Euripides and the Elizabethans; and which, if not consistently great, has many fine touches of both poetry and pathos. "The story of Callirrhoe," says the Preface, "is drawn from a classic source, but has never been raised from obscurity by ancient bard or dramatist. This fact has permitted a latitude

<sup>46</sup> Life and Poems, ed., by Gill, p. 49.

of treatment, unstrained by the fear of presumption." In the verse volume *Long Ago* by the same authoress (or authoresses) each lyric is suggested by a fragment of Sappho.

Ernest Myers in 1875 traveled in Greece and later translated Pindar and, in collaboration, the *Iliad*. Andrew Lang's translation of Theocritus was dedicated to him. His *Judgment of Prometheus* (1886) shows a dignified discipleship of Aeschylus and the epic poets. His *Rhodes* in passing laments the hour

"When Hellas bowed, her birthright gone,  
Beneath the might of Macedon";

and several short poems on Greek themes had appeared previously in *Poems* (1877).

At this point we may glance hastily over the work of certain minors and also over some more prominent figures who become minors for us from their very incidental connection with our subject. A few poems on Greek themes, sometimes of unquestionable merit, but all short, occur in the writings of Edwin Arnold, Austin Dobson, Edmund Gosse, and Charles Tennyson Turner. They remind us that almost every English poet of the late nineteenth century at some time made oblation to the Hellenic muse. Lord Tennyson, who from 1842 to 1885 published practically nothing concerning us here, printed late in the century his *Tiresias*, *Demeter and Persephone*, and *Death of Ænone*, the last covering ground already covered by William Morris.

Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton in the Preface to his *Lost Tales of Miletus* (1866) says of them: "I have selected from Hellenic myths those in which the ground is not preoccupied, by the great poets of antiquity in works yet extant; and which, therefore, may not be without the attraction of novelty to the general reader." The attraction of novelty is there; but the spell of poetry is not, his *Cydippe*; or, *The Apple* comparing but ill with William Morris's *Accontius and Cydippe*. Yet, weak as its unrhyming stanzas are, it seems a forerunner of *The Earthly Paradise*.

In the life of that arch-romanticist, William Sharp, written by his wife, we learn that Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* inspired him to compose a lyrical immature drama *Ariadne in Naxos*.<sup>47</sup> He also speaks later of being engaged on two other classic dramas, *The Kôre of Enna*<sup>48</sup> and *Persephonaia*,<sup>49</sup> or *The Drama of the*

<sup>47</sup> P. 22.

<sup>48</sup> P. 343.

<sup>49</sup> P. 415. If these plays have ever been published, I am not aware of it.



*House of Ætna*. Sharp's letters written from Greece are full of Hellenic enthusiasm.

Thomas Ashe between 1861 and 1866 published considerable Hellenic poetry, the best of it being in his drama *The Sorrows of Hypsipyle* (1866) which, says Havelock Ellis, has "a true breath of Greek feeling."<sup>50</sup>

Charles Mackay's *Studies from the Antique* (1864) consist mainly of short narratives and monologues much in the style of Landor's *Hellenics*, more lucid and easy to read, but decidedly less powerful, though by no means devoid of merit. Richard Garnett published "Idylls and Epigrams, chiefly from the Greek Anthology" (1869), and *Iphigenia in Delphi* (1890). Of the former all but thirty are translations; the last is a dramatic scene, rounding out the Orestes story of Euripides' great drama. G. F. Armstrong's *Garland from Greece* (1882) deals mainly with the modern country, but sometimes with the ancient, in verse occasionally picturesque though imitative and never powerful. Two of the longer narrative poems, *Selemnos* and *The Death of Epicurus* echo William Morris and Landor respectively. Several Greek poems occur also in the work of Canon R. W. Dixon (1884-86). Ross Neil (pseud. of Isabella Harwood) in 1883 published two neo-classical plays, *Orestes* and *Pandora*, of considerable merit.

The above list naturally grows more and more tentative as it nears the present. We have doubtless omitted some who well deserve a place there, and perhaps included some with doubtful claims to a place anywhere. The latter part of our study is avowedly superficial, without any adequate knowledge in many cases of the poet's background. Nevertheless our essay as a whole may give a synthetic survey of a field not yet carefully studied. The number of poets who have habitually or incidentally versified Greek themes has steadily increased through the nineteenth century. The tradition has shown a tendency to change in style and mood with the different critical *Zeitgeists* through which it has passed, as well as with the personality of each individual author. The medieval tradition, in common apparently with others also, has done the same. Yet through all its changes the Hellenic current has had a certain modifying power, suppressing alike the horrors of Gothic romance and the equal horrors of realism in favor of beauty and serenity. From Keats to Swinburne it

<sup>50</sup> Poets and Poetry of the Century, Vol. 4.

produced some of our greatest poetry. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth its representatives have almost wholly been dignified and sincere but not entirely successful minors. Is this because poetry in general has been at ebb, or is it because that particular kind of material is wearing a little threadbare? The late Professor Moody wrote one noble poem on the subject of Prometheus; but he turned from it immediately to other fields, which he may have thought more promising. The more we can have of Greek spirit and taste, the better; but will that spirit realize itself best through the revamping of Greek legends or through the handling of more modern incidents and problems? This is not a question to be answered hastily by any one; but it is a question which our young poets and critics ought to consider.

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